

Support for Iraq War Still Haunts Hillary Clinton's Candidacy

More than a dozen years later, Hillary Clinton is still being haunted by her decision to break with the majority of her Congressional Democratic colleagues and vote in favor of President George W. Bush's call to authorize the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Clinton is the only one of the five major announced candidates for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination who supported that illegal and unnecessary war, which not only resulted in 4,500 American deaths and thousands more permanently disabled, but hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths, the destabilization of the region with the rise of ISIS, and a dramatic increase in the federal deficit resulting in major cutbacks to important social programs.

Her defenders have characterized her vote as a "mistake." However, it would have been a mistake only if she had pushed the "aye" button when she had meant to push the "nay" button. It was quite deliberate and the implications still raise serious questions.

Pope John Paul II and the National Council of Catholic Bishops, along with the leadership of virtually every major mainline U.S. Protestant denomination, came out in opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The Christian groups that supported Bush's call for war were essentially restricted to right-wing fundamentalists, thereby raising some serious questions as to where Clinton is coming from theologically.

It is striking that many liberals -- who would not think of supporting her if she took positions on gay rights or abortion often identified with conservative Christian groups -- do not recognize the implications of her alliance with the Christian Right on this issue. This is ironic, since issues of war and peace are not only of greater prominence in the Gospels and are of far more significance theologically than anything about gay marriage or access to abortion, but are usually a stronger indicator of one's interpretation of faith as applied to social ethics and public policy. The fact that Clinton would reject the consensus of the mainline Protestant or Catholic theologians -- that the invasion did not come anywhere close to meeting the just war criteria -- and instead embrace the fundamentalists' position that it somehow did is therefore significant in understanding her worldview.

Her vote also raises concerns regarding her commitment to international law. The United Nations Charter forbids member states from using military force unless they find themselves under direct attack or if it is explicitly authorized by the UN Security Council. (Customary international law allows for pre-emptive war, but only in cases of an imminent threat, such as troops massing along the border or missiles preparing to be launched.)

Clinton, however -- despite being a graduate of one of the top law schools in the country -- insisted that the U.S. invasion was somehow "lawful" even though the war failed to get UN authorization and Iraq did not constitute any threat to the national security of the United States.

Her supporters have defended her vote on the grounds that she had been provided intelligence data that convinced her that Iraq had "weapons of mass destruction." However, even if that had been the case, the

consequences of the war would have been no better. It would have still been illegal. And such weapons would have likely been used against U.S. soldiers, dramatically increasing U.S. casualties.

Furthermore, virtually all the alleged intelligence data made available to Congress has since been declassified and most strategic analysts have found it to have been transparently weak, based primarily on hearsay by Iraqi exiles of dubious credibility and conjecture by ideologically-driven Bush administration officials. It also raises the question why Clinton ignored the plethora of information provided by UN inspectors, reports by independent strategic analysts, and articles in reputable arms control journals that challenged the administration's fabricated claims she so willingly embraced.

She was also the only Democratic senator to make the absurd claim -- which had been repeatedly challenged by scholars, diplomats, and other observers -- that the secular Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein was supporting the Salafist Islamist Al-Qaeda movement.

This raises concerns that, as president, she might again be willing to blindly accept similarly inaccurate and alarmist intelligence claims over more sober strategic analysis in making decisions on whether to go to war.

More troubling, roughly 30 countries (including the United States) really do have chemical or biological weapons and/or nuclear programs with weapons potential, thereby raising the question as to how many of these countries Clinton, as president, would be willing to invade as well.

Regardless, it appears that Hussein's alleged possession of "weapons of mass destruction" and ties to Al-Qaeda were not the determining factors in her decision to support the war authorization. Indeed, many months after the U.S. invasion and the Bush administration's acknowledgement that Iraq had neither any WMDs nor any ties to Al-Qaeda, she [declared in a speech](#) at George Washington University, "I was one who supported giving President Bush the authority, if necessary, to use force against Saddam Hussein. I believe that that was the right vote" and it was one that "I stand by."

Indeed, she did not express any regret for her vote until just prior to candidacy for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, after public opinion had swung decidedly against the war. She has yet to formally apologize.

Not only could Clinton's support for the Iraq War undermine her prospects for the 2016 presidential nomination, should she become the nominee, it could threaten her chances that November. The Republicans will likely make as a key argument during the fall campaign, that Bush had effectively won the Iraq war in 2008 but the Obama administration recklessly withdrew U.S. troops, resulting in the rise of ISIS, a major threat to our national security. While there are a number of ways this line of attack can be refuted, by far the most important one is that the U.S. should have never invaded Iraq in the first place.

Clinton, as a supporter of the invasion, will be unable to make this argument.

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